



## Tower Rock State Park Indian Education For All Lesson Plan

### Title

The Old North Trail

### Content Area

Social Studies

### Grade levels

4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>

### Duration

45 minutes to 1 hour (or longer if needed)

### Goals (Montana Standards/Essential Understandings)

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 3:** The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.

**ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 6:** History is a story and most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. Histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective conflicts with what most of mainstream history tells us.

### Overview

In this lesson plan students will use information provided and gathered from various sources to learn about one of the most ancient trails on the continent, the Old North Trail. Students will be introduced to the terms and gain an understanding of the “Ice Free Corridor” and the “Land Bridge”. They will also be able to gain a better understanding of Native American perspectives.

### Objectives

The students will learn:

- That for over 10,000 years people used the Old North Trail. The earliest use was probably by people migrating from the Asian continent to North America and this trail played a significant role in the “peopling” of the Americas.
- It is important to remind students that Bering Strait migration is one of several theories and new evidence is being uncovered leading scientists to rework / rethink long held beliefs.

- That during the Ice Age sea levels dropped and an area between the Asian Continent and Alaska was open land, creating a land bridge between Asia and North America at the Bering Strait.
- That also during the Ice Age an area parallel to the Rocky Mountains was free of ice allowing people to move from the north and spread over both the North and South American continents.
- Students will also learn about native people's perspective on how they came to be here on this continent and this account, in many cases, differs from the "scientific" account.

Students will develop skill in these areas:

- Mapping, analysis, making decisions and drawing conclusions

## Teacher Preparation

- Teacher should read the following resources:
  - Wikipedia entry for Vine Deloria  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Earth%2C\\_White\\_Lies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Earth%2C_White_Lies)
  - [www.imperialoil.ca/Canada-English/thisis/publications/2001q1/pdf/s\\_highway.pdf](http://www.imperialoil.ca/Canada-English/thisis/publications/2001q1/pdf/s_highway.pdf)
  - [http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Bering\\_Land\\_Bridge](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Bering_Land_Bridge)
  - Encyclopedia Article Title: Americas, Antiquity and Prehistory of The. Encyclopedia Title: The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. Publisher: Columbia University Press. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 2004
- Teachers will need to gather the materials for the lesson and get familiar with the Map(s), and other materials used in the lesson. Material included in this lesson plan are:
  - *An Ancient Highway*, Graham Chandler- Imperial Oil Review Spring 2001-Volume 85 No. 440
  - [www.imperialoil.ca/Canada-English/thisis/publications/2001q1/pdf/s\\_highway.pdf](http://www.imperialoil.ca/Canada-English/thisis/publications/2001q1/pdf/s_highway.pdf)  
*teachers may share relevant portions of this article with the students to help them understand a contemporary view of the Old North Trail, it's location and it's significance to Native people.*
  - World map that shows Asia to the left of the United States
  - Montana regional map showing "creation story" sites
  - The Blackfeet creation story – by Chewing Blackbones, Blackfeet tribal Elder

## Two perspectives about the First Americans

- **Perspective number one: Read to class. Before reading please remind students that Native people's perspectives on how they came to be here on this continent and this account, in many cases, differ from the "scientific" account. New evidence is being uncovered leading scientists to rework / rethink long held beliefs.**

## ***Land Bridge to the Americas***

Archaeological evidence indicates that the first human inhabitants arrived in the Americas less than 20,000 years ago. Since humans inhabited other continents much earlier, their relatively recent appearance here is puzzling. Many scientists now think that the first Americans may have migrated across a land bridge that connected North America and Eurasia during the Pleistocene Epoch.

Today the continents are separated by the Bering Strait. The Bering Strait is a narrow, shallow stretch of water that lies between Siberia and Alaska. At their closest points, the land masses are just 80 km apart. About 20,000 years ago, continental ice sheets covered much of North America. In some places the ice sheets were 1.6 km to 3.2 km thick and held huge quantities of frozen water. As a result, the level of the oceans was about 140 m lower than it is today. Since the Bering Strait is currently only 42 m deep, the ocean floor between Eurasia and North America would have emerged as the sea level dropped. The Bering land bridge would then have been 1,000 m to 6,000 m wide.

The first Americans were probably Eurasian hunters who followed herds of bison and mammoth across the Bering land bridge into North America. By 13,000 B.C. these nomads had reached the southern end of South America. The Bering land bridge probably lasted several thousand years, until the glaciers retreated and the level of the oceans rose again.

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## Activity

The following activity is designed to show students that early people may have migrated across the Bering Strait and settled on the North American Continent. Students working in groups, will use problem solving skills to build a consensus on this issue.

Using the world map, tell the students the following story:

A time long ago on this continent (point to Asia), a group of people who followed their food, such as bison and mammoths, roamed the area. As the people continued their daily search for food they were slowly lead to this point (point to the Bering Strait). As they continued to follow their food they found themselves here (point to North American side of Bering Strait). As these people continued to follow their food they eventually scattered themselves throughout North America. Now, here is the challenge – you can see that there is no land between these two continents, yet animals and people crossed here. Your task is to tell me how the people got across, or what did they walk on to get to North America.

As the students begin to discuss this story in their respective groups, introduce the following concepts one at a time.

- The animals had no boats and most people walked.
- The weather turned very cold.
- An Ice Age occurred.
- As icebergs grew, oceans shrank.
- The animals and people walked on bare ground.

(most probable answer: they walked across land bridge).

(Activity modified from Cheryl Turk-Barrus, submitted to AskERIC Lesson Plan #: AELP-STH0003)

## Perspective number two

Blackfeet Creation Story (read individually or in small groups)

Out of respect for the Blackfeet Nation please ask students to be mindful of the fact that this story is still told in traditional ways through a long history of oral tradition. Ideally, it would be best to invite a Blackfeet elder to retell this story in person.

## **Creation Story**

*Blackfeet, as told by Chewing Black Bones to Ella E. Clark*

**Old Man came from the south, making the [Rocky] mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals also. He traveled northward making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there --arranging the world as we see it today.**

**He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today, they show the shape of his body, legs, arms and hair.**

**Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. He said aloud, "You are a bad thing to make me stumble so." Then he raised up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on farther north, and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills.**

**Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it made all kinds of roots and berries to grow: camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, sarvisberries, bull-berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground.**

**When he created the bighorn sheep with its big head and horns, he made it out on the prairie. But it did not travel easily on the prairie; it was awkward and could not go fast. So Old Man took it by its horns, led it up into the mountain, and turned it loose. There the bighorn skipped about among the rocks and went up fearful places with ease. So Old Man said to it, "This is the kind of place that suits you; this is what you are fitted for, the rocks, and the mountains."**

**While he was in the mountains, he made the antelope out of dirt and turned it loose to see how it would do. It ran so fast that it fell over some rocks and hurt itself. Seeing that the mountains were not the place for it, Old Man took the antelope down to the prairie and turned it loose. When he saw it running away fast and gracefully, he said, "This is what you are suited to, the broad prairie."**

**One day, Old Man decided that he would make a woman and a child. So he formed them both of clay, the woman and the child, her son.**

**After he had molded the clay in human shape, he said to it, "You must be people." And then he covered it up and went away. The next morning he went to the place, took off the covering, looked at the images, and said "Arise and walk." They did so. They walked down to the river with their maker, and then he told them that his name was Napi (pronounced nopyy), Old Man.**

**This is how we came to be people. It is he who made us.**

**The first people were poor and naked, and they did not know how to do anything for themselves. Old Man showed them the roots and berries and said, "You can eat these." Then he pointed to certain trees, "When the bark of these trees is young and tender, it is good. Then you can peel it off and eat it."**

**He told the people that the animals also should be their food. "These are your herds," he said. "All these little animals that live on the ground -- squirrels, rabbits, skunks, beavers, are good to eat. You need not fear to eat their flesh. All the birds that fly, these too, I have made for you, so that you can eat of their flesh."**

**Old Man took the first people over the prairies and through the forests, then the swamps to show them the different plants he had created. He told them what herbs were good for sicknesses, saying often, "The root of this herb or the leaf of this herb, if gathered in a certain month of the year, is good for certain sickness."**

**In that way the people learned the power of all herbs.**

**Then he showed them how to make weapons with which to kill the animals for their food. First, he went out**

**and cut some sarvisberry shoots, brought them in, and peeled the bark off them. He took one of the larger shoots, flattened it, tied a string to it, and thus made a bow. Then he caught one of the birds he had made, took feathers from its wing, split them, and tied them to a shaft of wood.**

**At first he tied four feathers along the shaft, and with this bow sent the arrow toward its mark. But he found that it did not fly well. When he used only three feathers, it went straight to the mark. Then he went out and began to break sharp pieces off the stones. When he tied them at the ends of his arrows, he found that the black flint stones, and some white flint, made the best arrow points.**

**When the people had learned to make bow and arrows, Old Man taught them how to shoot animals and birds. Because it is not healthful to eat animals' flesh raw, he showed the first people how to make fire. He gathered soft, dry rotten driftwood and made a punk of it. Then he found a piece of hard wood and drilled a hole in it with an arrow point. He gave the first man a pointed piece of hard wood and showed him how to roll it between his hands until sparks came out and the punk caught fire. Then he showed the people how to cook the meat of the animals they had killed and how to eat it.**

**He told them to get a certain kind of stone that was on the land, while he found a harder stone. With the hard stone he had them hollow out the softer one and so make a kettle. Thus, they made their dishes.**

**Old Man told the first people how to get spirit power: "Go away by yourself and go to sleep. Something will come to you in your dream that will help you. It may be some animal. Whatever this animal tells you in your sleep, you must do. Obey it. Be guided by it. If later you want help, if you are traveling alone and cry aloud for help, your prayer will be answered. It may be by an eagle, perhaps by a buffalo, perhaps by a bear. Whatever animal hears your prayer you must listen to it."**

**That was how the first people got along in the world, by the power given to them in their dreams.**

**After this, Old Man kept on traveling north. Many of the animals that he had created followed him. They understood when he spoke to them, and they were his servants. When he got to the north point of the Porcupine Mountains, he made some more mud images of people, blew his breath upon them, and they became people, men and women. They asked him, "What are we to eat?"**

**By way of answer, Old Man made many images of clay in the form of buffalo. Then he blew breath upon them and they stood up. When he made signs to them, they started to run. Then he said to the people, "Those animals--buffalo--are your food."**

**"But how can we kill them?" the people asked.**

**"I will show you," he answered.**

**He took them to a cliff and told them to build rock piles: "Now hide behind these piles of rocks," he said. "I will lead the buffalo this way. When they are opposite you, rise up."**

**After telling them what to do, he started toward the herd of buffalo. When he called the animals, they started to run toward him, and they followed him until they were inside the piles of rock. Then Old Man dropped back. As the people rose up, the buffalo ran in a straight line and jumped over the cliff.**

**"Go down and take the flesh of those animals," said Old Man.**

**The people tried to tear the limbs apart, but they could not. Old Man went to the edge of the cliff, broke off some pieces with sharp edges, and told the people to cut the flesh with these rocks. They obeyed him. When they had skinned the buffalo, they set up some poles and put the hides on them. Thus they made a shelter to sleep under.**

**After Old Man had taught the people all these things, he started off again, traveling north until he came to where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet. There he made some more people and taught them the same things.**

***From there he went farther north. When he had gone almost to the Red Deer River, he was so tired that he lay down on a hill. The form of his body can be seen there yet, on the top of the hill where he rested.***

***When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled farther north until he came to a high hill. He climbed to the top of it and there he sat down to rest. As he gazed over the country, he was greatly pleased by it. Looking at the steep hill below him, he said to himself, "This is a fine place for sliding. I will have some fun." And he began to slide down the hill. The marks where he slid are to be seen yet, and the place is known to all the Blackfeet tribes as "Old Man's Sliding Ground."***

***Old Man can never die. Long ago he left the Blackfeet and went away toward the west, disappearing in the mountains. Before he started, he said to the people, "I will always take care of you, and some day I will return."***

***Even today some people think that he spoke the truth and that when he comes back he will bring with him the buffalo, which they believe the white men have hidden. Others remember that before he left them he said that when he returned he would find them a different people. They would be living in a different world, he said, from that which he had created for them and had taught them to live in.***

***- The story above was told by Chewing Black Bones, a respected Blackfeet elder, to Ella E. Clark who later published the account in her book, "Indian Legends from the Northern Rockies".  
(source "Neshoba")***

Ask students, using the "[Old Man's Journey](#)" map, to trace the route of Old Man. Students should be able to identify specific locations referred to in the story.

How do the two perspectives differ? How are they similar?

### **Blackfeet use of the Old North Trail**

**A century ago Chief Brings-Down-the-Sun told Walter McClintock about the Old North Trail:**

**"There is a well-known trail we call the Old North Trail. It runs north and south along the Rocky Mountains. No one knows how long it has been used by the Indians. My father told me it originated in the migration of a great tribe of Indians from the distant north to the south, and all the tribes have, ever since, continued to follow in their tracks.**

**"The Old North Trail is now becoming overgrown with moss and grass, but it was worn so deeply, by many generations of travelers, that the travois tracks and horse trail are still plainly visible...**

**"In many places the white man's roads and towns have obliterated the Old Trail. It forked where the city of Calgary now stands. The right fork ran north into the Barren Lands as far as people live. The main trail ran south along the eastern side of the Rockies, at a uniform distance from the mountains, keeping clear of the forest and outside of the foothills. It ran close to where the city of Helena now stands and extended south into the country inhabited by a people with dark skins and long hair falling over their faces.**

**"My father once told me of an expedition from the Blackfeet that went south by the Old Trail to visit the people with dark skins. Elk Tongue and his wife, Natoya, were of this expedition, also Arrow Top and Pemmican, who was a boy of 12 at that time. He died only a few years ago at the age of 95. They were absent four years. It took them 12 moons of steady traveling to reach the country of the dark-skinned people, and 18 moons to come north again. They returned by a longer route through the "High Trees" or Bitterroot country, where they could travel without danger of being seen. They feared going along the North Trail because it was frequented by their enemies, the Crows, Sioux, and Cheyennes.**

**"I have followed the Old North Trail so often that I know every mountain, stream, and river far to the south as**

well as toward the distant north" (Brings-Down-the-Sun in McClintock 1992: 434-437).

## Optional activity

The National Park Service has a great "Land Bridge" math activity on its website:

[www.nps.gov/akso/ParkWise/Teachers/Treasures/BELA\\_Footprints/activities/BeringianMath.htm](http://www.nps.gov/akso/ParkWise/Teachers/Treasures/BELA_Footprints/activities/BeringianMath.htm)

## Extensions

- Invite a Blackfeet Tribal Member/Elder to your classroom to learn about tribal history.
- Websites with related information:
  - The Old North Trail-America's earliest highway by Marcella Sherfy-  
[www.edheritage.org/HE\\_04spr/Old\\_North.html](http://www.edheritage.org/HE_04spr/Old_North.html)
  - The Old North Trail - [www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/1997/july/trail.php](http://www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/1997/july/trail.php)
  - The Old North Trail: Or, Life, Legends, and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians. Walter McClintock; University of Nebraska Press, 1992
- Visit Tower Rock State Park to see the interpretive displays related to the Old North Trail

## **EVALUATION:**

Discussion/observation

Participation